



News Release

Iowa Association of School Boards

6000 Grand Avenue, Des Moines, Iowa 50312

www.ia-sb.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Margaret Buckton, IASB associate executive director, public policy, (515) 288-1991 ext. 228 or

mbuckton@ia-sb.org

Sam Harding, Jefferson-Scranton school board vice president, (515) 370-0301

Doug Batcheller, Sioux City school board president, (712) 251-5687

John Burgart, Dubuque superintendent, (563) 552-3012

IASB Opposes School Start Date Legislation Members believe local control best serves students and families

Des Moines, IA (March 4, 2009) – The Iowa Association of School Boards and its members oppose proposed legislation that would eliminate school districts’ ability to select their own school start dates and set calendars that are most beneficial for their communities.

Currently, Iowa law states “classroom days for students can begin no sooner than the week in which Sept. 1 falls.” But the law also provides flexibility for schools by offering a waiver through the Iowa Department of Education. Currently, most school districts in the state receive that waiver annually and begin school in August. Many of the school districts in Iowa’s tourist areas, however, such as Spirit Lake and Okoboji, work with their local business communities to start later, to help provide a workforce to support the local economy.

The proposed legislation would change the start date and forbid schools from holding classes before the last Monday in August. It would eliminate the waiver. IASB members agree with the Iowa Department of Education, that the DE should not be in the waiver business. **School board members support eliminating the waiver and allowing locally elected leaders, working with their communities, parents and staff, to set the calendar that most meets the needs of students.** Board members statewide voted overwhelmingly at the 2008 IASB Delegate Assembly last fall in favor of ending the waiver process and allowing schools to set their own calendars.

“This is a local control issue and should remain that way,” said Sam Harding, Jefferson-Scranton school board vice president. “One of the things I’ve heard repeatedly from the Legislature over the past several years is that we should always be making our decisions based on the impact on student achievement based on research based data. I don’t think tourism or less air conditioning has any research that I know of that impacts student achievement.”

Doug Batcheller, Sioux City school board president, agreed. “A week ago, the Sioux City Community School District approved a calendar that begins the 2010-11 school year in mid-August so that we can finish the first semester before Christmas. We carefully studied all the aspects of this change for our community, staff and students. This is an area best managed by districts, not by the Legislature. We are in the best position to evaluate these issues for our district, including whether the cost of utilities is a worthy expenditure. For us to get our professional development embedded throughout the year and to allow teachers to work on their advanced degrees in the summer, we anticipate improved student achievement, which is why we approved the change.”

School districts in the regents university areas also work closely with their communities to align calendars. This helps high school students who take post-secondary coursework, and makes it easier for families to spend quality time together when parents work at the universities.

“When preparing the annual school calendar the Iowa City Community School District makes every attempt to align with the University of Iowa calendar,” said Lane Plugge, Iowa City school superintendent. “It is important for ICCSD to maintain the authority to make changes in the school calendar in order to achieve the greatest degree of consistency with the U of I calendar.”

Other administrators also prefer local control. “I want to voice my strong objection to the Legislature proposing this action,” said John Burgart, superintendent of the Dubuque school district. “This is yet another example of the Legislature usurping what limited authority local school boards have to structure educational programming in accordance with the wishes and needs of the community members who elect them.”

Parents are also concerned about this bill, and prefer to be part of the decision-making process when it comes to school calendars. “Des Moines Public Schools runs a calendar committee that’s comprised of parents, teachers, administrators and the teachers’ union rep. Having served on that committee several times, it’s a completely logical and democratic process and one that should not be subject to legislative involvement,” said parent Stacy Bredbeck, who is also active with the Iowa PTA. IPTA is evaluating the proposal with its members.

The bill was approved by the House Education Committee on Monday, with an amendment to clarify that there are no waivers, eliminate the waiver for emergencies, and apply the mandate to nonpublic schools.

Please find the following additional resources at www.ia-sb.org:

IASB Action Network: School Start Date: <http://www.ia-sb.org/Publications.aspx?id=6754>

IASB 2009 Legislative Resolutions (See #18): <http://www.ia-sb.org/Publications.aspx?id=5008>

**IASB is a private, nonprofit organization representing Iowa's 362 school districts,
10 area education agencies and 15 community colleges.**

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